

The Bystander

Bullying situations usually involve more than the aggressor and the target. They also involve bystanders—those who watch bullying happen or hear about it. Depending on how bystanders respond, they can either contribute to the problem *or* the solution. Bystanders rarely play a completely neutral role.

Hurtful Bystanders

Some bystanders encourage the bullying by laughing, cheering, or making comments. And other bystanders join in the bullying once it has begun.

But Most Bystanders passively accept bullying by watching and doing nothing. Without realizing it, these bystanders also contribute to the problem. Passive bystanders provide the silent acceptance that allows people who bully to continue their hurtful behavior.

Bystanders have the power to play a key role in preventing or stopping bullying.

Some bystanders intervene by discouraging the aggressor, defending the target or redirecting the situation away from bullying. Other bystanders get help by rallying support from peers to stand up against bullying or by reporting the bullying to adults.

Why don't more bystanders intervene?

- They think, "It's none of my business."
- They are afraid of getting hurt or becoming another victim.
- They feel powerless to stop the bully.
- They don't like the victim or believe the victim "deserves" it.
- They don't want to draw attention to themselves.
- They fear retribution.
- They think that telling adults won't help or it may make things worse.
- They don't know what to do.

Bystanders who don't intervene or don't report the bullying often suffer negative consequences themselves. They may experience:

- Pressure to participate in the bullying
- Anxiety about speaking to anyone about the bullying
- Powerlessness to stop bullying
- Guilt for not having defended the victim

Preparing Children to Become Helpful Bystanders

Adults can prepare children to become helpful bystanders by talking to them about the different ways bystanders can make a difference and by letting them know that adults will support them when they step forward.

*Adapted and used by permission from [eyesonbullying.org](http://www.eyesonbullying.org)
<http://www.eyesonbullying.org/bystander.html>*